



sift/In an hourglass.” The other for the list of men in the firehouse, and for all the lists all around the city: “Hope had grown gray hairs.”

I walked away. I was weeping. Nearby, on a sort of makeshift wire stand to the left of the entryway, was a single pair of fireman’s boots, bent, smothered in ashes, empty.

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I HAD BEEN TRYING to give blood for days, but that proved impossible. The telephone numbers given out on TV and in the paper were constantly busy. The blood centers were overwhelmed, and the media said so. Finally, I got through to an 800 number, and they told me I could go to a blood center at 53rd and Lexington the next morning. There had been reports circulating that blood wasn’t actually needed. That there weren’t that many survivors. That St. Vincent’s Hospital in Greenwich Village, perpared to receive hundreds, perhaps thousands, of patients, had only received a few. So, I was glad to be told that my blood was needed. I took that as a sign that these reports would be proven wrong. They were still digging there, ferociously, five days later. Anything could happen. And we all heard the stories of people surviving without food for



weeks. They might find men and women still. And they would probably need blood.

The day was beautiful, sunny and warm. I got on my bicycle at 103rd street and Riverside Drive and headed for Central Park. I have made this ride hundreds of times. I entered the Park at 100th Street, joined the riders circling, rode past the Reservoir, Tavern on the Green, the softball fields, and banked east. I took the exit at Central Park South and Fifth Avenue. I rode east to Lexington, turned south, and rode until 53rd Street. On a good day, when there isn't much traffic—a Sunday morning like this, for example—I could make the trip in 30 minutes. Today, the streets were practically deserted, and so I was there very soon. But my speed gave me an eerie feeling.

I got there about 10 am, and there was already a huge line. I parked my bike, and took my place at the end. Fairly soon, someone came by asking if anyone's blood type was O-negative. Then asked if any of us did not know what blood type we were. I didn't. I felt sheepish, as if there were an elemental fact about myself, like my birth date, I should know. In fact, it seemed far more important, because it might save my life, or somebody else's. I raised my hand. I was grateful to see that many others did too.

The aide ushered us to the other side of the building to another line. I took my place again.

The line was made up of different sorts, but I'd have to say that in general the people were young—by that I mean under 35. I'm 56. Everyone waited calmly. The line didn't move for quite a while, and once in a while blood center workers came by with snacks for us. People lent cell phones freely to those that didn't have them. Today, the phones were working. There was a young guy ahead of me who talked more or less incessantly on the phone; it became clear after a while that he was in finance of some kind. The different categories—broker, investment banker, whatever—have always been indistinguishable to me. There are so many young financial people in New York—especially since the heyday of the 1980's. They look about twenty years old, and they seem to be making thousands of dollars every minute. They exude an assumptive confidence as if they were of royal blood. He was here, yes, but he was dealing too soon for my taste.

Eventually, the line began moving. I was pleased I would be able to at least do one thing for the injured and perhaps even help save a life. The line moved quickly, and when I got to the front, I realized why. A woman was handing out what appear-



ed to be movie tickets from an enormous roll. I reached the front, and she handed me mine. It said, "Admit One." I still have it.

"What do I do with this?" I asked.

"Come back this afternoon. Bring it with you."

"But how will I know what place I was in line?"

"Look there. See that small number. That's your number. When you come back, we'll call out that number, and then you can give blood."

I looked at the tiny number with many digits printed at the edge of the ticket. 93993873.

"Oh," I said. I put it in my pocket, got my bike, and rode back home.

Later that day, around 4 pm, I rode back to 53rd and Lexington. There was a sort of hodge-podge crowd there—no discernible order or form. I went to the front where a man was handing out forms.

"I was here this morning," I said holding my ticket up like a new recruit. "So, where do I go?"

He handed me a form. "Fill this out—your name, address and phone number. We'll call you."

"So, I'm not giving today?"

"No. But we'll call you."

Everything in New York had been thrown into chaos, so why not this too?

I filled out the form, handed it back, and then got on my bicycle and rode home.

Days passed. And during those days, we all heard